

# Every dark cloud has a silver lining

"WEEE Day" has arrived. From 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007, the responsibility for disposing of waste electrical/electronic product lies mostly with brands and retailers. Yet, while fulfilment of WEEE obligations may appear an unavoidable burden, there are opportunities to be had from this thrust to help save the planet from the destructive actions of its occupants. **Daniel Todaro**, Managing Director of field marketing agency Gekko, looks at how retailers and brands can encourage consumers to "go green", while developing sales in the process.



Daniel Todaro, Managing Director of Gekko

For several years now the issue of global warming has commanded media attention, and consumers, retailers and manufacturers all tend to agree that action is required if we are to reduce our carbon footprint into the future. But who should lead the way?

There are plenty of technologically advanced, innovative products on the market offering eco-friendly solutions, such as power- and water-saving washing machines and energy-conserving fridges. The question is: are these features neglected by consumers who favour form over function? As head of a field marketing agency, I am naturally intrigued by the challenges facing the electrical industry, especially in light of the implementation of the WEEE Directive this month. There are indeed several factors which dictate a consumer's purchase of white goods, for example: style, aesthetics, functionality, noise level, efficiency, ease of use and price are often considered above how "green" a product is. This is hardly surprising when you consider that some brands target young professionals who commonly purchase stylish products in keeping with their lifestyle. And it's not unusual for young parents to opt for more affordable and durable products, perhaps again, failing to consider the environmental implications.

However, the WEEE Directive presents a golden opportunity for marketers looking to appeal to an environmental conscience. The proliferation of the organic and fair trade food markets illustrates the prevalence of ethical and environmentally conscious consumption. Not only has this movement achieved pedigree status, it has gained

economic credibility, forcing the business world to take notice. The success of this market demonstrates that, when provided with correct and targeted information, consumers are happy to pay a premium in support of a cause they believe in. There is no reason why the electrical market shouldn't see similar development if brands and retailers approach it correctly.

Part of the challenge lies in store and there will be benefits from taking a field marketing approach. Training retail staff, providing in-store demonstrations, displaying information that is targeted and relevant, and controlling POS usage is key. This is not a case of teaching granny to suck eggs: green could become the new "white" if retailers and brands take full advantage of selling the benefits of energy-efficient products, resulting in increased financial dividends and prolonged brand loyalty.

## FIELD MARKETING TIPS FOR ELECTRICAL RETAILERS

- **Merchandising** – Consumers might have an idea of the product they want, but at the same time they want to know the alternatives available to them, so displays and information highlighting environmentally friendly products and latest innovations are essential.
- **Staff training** – In seeking reassurance that they are buying the most environmentally friendly products, customers will want to consult confident, knowledgeable staff. Clearly, some members of staff will be better equipped in particular areas, so it is important to identify these strengths and assign those people appropriately.

- **Demonstrations** – Where possible, provide facilities for product demonstrations. Demonstrating a particular product while highlighting its environmental credentials will leave a lasting impression with consumers.

- **Brand awareness** – Many consumers differentiate between one product/brand and another on price alone. Brands should concentrate on raising awareness by informing consumers of efforts to reduce their carbon footprint. This will increase customer loyalty, and, the loyalty of store staff.

- **Information & "silent salesman" tools** – Customers often want to research their purchase by themselves, but a huge array of products can make this a confusing process. Providing targeted information, product guides and clear advice will help forward the process and, ultimately, develop sales.

Field marketing is a tried and tested method of tackling the challenge of driving sales in a competitive retail arena. Typically, it involves the out-sourcing of promotional and sales activity by brands and retailers to enhance profitability and achieve business objectives. By deploying representatives in store to perform these activities, sellers can build brand awareness and loyalty, creating a win-win outcome for all and delivering a tangible return on investment. While the media is focused on all things "green", now is the time for brands and retailers to develop strategies that take advantage of, what is essentially, free publicity and support for the drive for energy efficiency. ∴